

*An Introduction to the
Sciences of the
Qur'aan*



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Dedicated to:

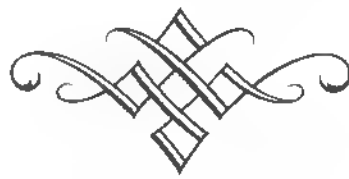
Ammi and Abbi,

*without whom,
after the blessings of Allaah,
all this would not be possible.*

رَبِّ اَرْحَمُهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَّانِي صَغِيرًا

*«O My Lord! Bestow your Mercy on them,
even as they reared me when I was young» [17:24]*

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AN INTRODUCTION TO 'ULOOM AL-QUR'AAN



I. Definition of 'Uloom al-Qur'aan

The knowledge of *'uloom al-Qur'aan*, or 'The Sciences of the Qur'aan', deals with the knowledge of those sciences that have a direct bearing on the recitation, history, understanding and implementation of the Qur'aan. It is, therefore, a vast field of Islaamic scholarship, and one that is of primary importance.

Thus, for example, with regards to recitation, *'uloom al-Qur'aan* deals with the science of pronunciation (*tajweed*), the different methodologies of reciting the Qur'aan (the *qira'aat*), the blessings of reciting the Qur'aan, and the etiquette of its recitation.

With regards to the history of the Qur'aan, *'uloom al-Qur'aan* deals with the stages of revelation of the Qur'aan, the compilation of the Qur'aan, the art and history of writing the Qur'aanic script (*rasm al-masaahif*), and the preservation of the Qur'aan.

With regards to its understanding and implementation, *'uloom al-Qur'aan* covers the causes of revelation (*asbaab an-nuzool*), the knowledge of the *makkee* and *madanee* revelations, the knowledge of the various forms (*ahruf*) it was revealed in, the understanding of its abrogated rulings and verses (*naasikh wa al-mansookh*), the knowledge of the various classifications of its verses (*muhkam* and *mutashaabih*, *'aam* and *khaas*, *mutlaq* and *muqqayad*, etc.), the knowledge of the inimitable style of the Qur'aan (*i'jaaz al-Qur'aan*), the knowledge of its interpretation (*tafseer*), the grammatical analysis of the Qur'aan (*'iraab al-Qur'aan*) and the knowledge of those words whose usage has become uncommon over time (*ghareeb al-Qur'aan*).

It has been said that the knowledge of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* is in reality the knowledge that one is required to know in order to properly interpret the Qur'aan. Therefore, to call this branch of Islaamic knowledge 'The Procedure and Methodology of Interpretation' (*'Ilm Usool at-Tafseer*) instead of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* would not be far from the truth.⁹ However, *'uloom al-Qur'aan* also includes topics that have very little or no bearing on *tafseer*, such as the compilation of the Qur'aan, and the development

9 cf. ar-Roomee, Fahd ibn 'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn Sulaymaan: *Dirasaat fi 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, Maktabah at-Tawbah, Riyadh, 1994, p. 33, who equates *'Uloom al-Qur'aan* with *Usool at-tafseer*.

of the script of the Qur'aan. Therefore, the knowledge of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* is more general than *'Ilm Uṣool at-Tafseer*.

II. Benefits of Studying 'Uloom al-Qur'aan

There are many benefits to the knowledge of *'uloom al-Qur'aan*. Firstly, it enables the reader to realize the wealth of knowledge and insight that exists with regards to the Book of Allaah. As some of the scholars of the past said, “True knowledge is to know one’s ignorance.” Only when a person realizes what he does *not* know will he appreciate how little he *does* know. Secondly, it enables the student of knowledge to better understand the Qur'aan, in that he will be familiar with the history of its revelation and collection, and the various aspects that aid its comprehension. When he reads the books of *tafseer*, he will be able to understand the terms used, and benefit from the knowledge in them to a greater extent. In other words, he will be equipped to further increase his knowledge and to learn more about his religion. Thirdly, it increases a person’s belief (*eemaan*), because he will realize the beauty of the Qur'aan and the great blessings that he has been given through its revelation. He will not be fooled by the fallacious claims of its enemies, and his heart will be at ease with regards to its authenticity. He will understand the miraculous nature of the Qur'aan, and thus better cherish the greatest Book that mankind has been given. Fourthly, he will be able to defend the Qur'aan against its enemies, since he will be equipped with the true and pristine knowledge of the Qur'aan, unadulterated by the prejudices of its opponents.

It is no exaggeration to say that, once a person learns the essentials of his religion and what is required for him to know, the first knowledge he should turn his attention to is the knowledge of the Qur'aan and its sciences. As Allaah says¹⁰ in the Qur'aan,

كُنُتْ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبْرَكٌ لِيَذَبَّ رُؤُوءَ آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَذَكَّرَ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٣٩﴾

«(This is a) Book that We have sent down to you, full of blessings, so that they may ponder over its verses, and that men of understanding may remember» [38:29]

III. The History of 'Uloom al-Qur'aan

Like all the sciences of Islaam, the knowledge of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* initiated with the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. The Companions used to question the Prophet (ﷺ) about any concept that they did not understand in the Qur'aan. For example, concerning the verse,

10 It should be pointed out that the Qur'aan is only in Arabic, and is the speech (*kalām*) of Allaah, as shall be proved and elaborated upon in the next chapter. Therefore, the unconditional phrase, “Allaah says,” when used in this book (or any book), only refers to the Qur'aan. When this phrase is used in a language other than Arabic, it contains an additional implicit clause that should be understood by the audience, and this clause is, “the meaning of which is,” since the Qur'aan is only in Arabic. Therefore, this phrase should be understood as, “The meaning of what Allaah has said is...”

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

«Those who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice, only they will have security, and they are the guided»[6:82]

they asked, “O Messenger of Allaah! Who amongst us does not do injustice (to his soul)?” They had understood that the verse was referring to those believers who did not commit any injustice, or sin. The Prophet (ﷺ) replied that the injustice referred to in this verse was *shirk*, or the association of partners with Allaah.¹¹

Such was the enthusiasm of the Companions in seeking this knowledge that they were able to not only explain any verse in the Qur'aan, but also give its history and the cause of its revelation. Ibn Mas'ood said, “I swear by Allaah, besides whom there is no other god, there is no *soorah* in the Qur'aan except that I know where it was revealed! And there is not a single verse in the Qur'aan except that I know the reason behind its revelation! If there were any person that knew more about the Qur'aan than I did, and it was possible for me to reach him, I would ride (on my camel) towards him (to get this knowledge).”¹² 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib told his students, “Ask me! For I swear by Allaah, there is nothing that you will ask me except that I will answer you. Ask me concerning the book of Allaah! For I swear by Allaah, there is not a single verse in the Qur'aan except that I know whether it was revealed at night or during the day, or on a mountain or on a plain!”¹³

There were many Companions who were famous for their knowledge of the Qur'aan, among them the four *Khulafaa ar-Raashidoon*,¹⁴ 'Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood (d. 32 A.H.), 'Abdullaah ibn 'Abbaas (d. 68 A.H.), Ubay ibn Ka'ab (d. 32 A.H.), Zayd ibn Thaabit (d. 45 A.H.), Aboo Moosaa al-Ash'aree (d. 50 A.H.), 'Abdullaah ibn Zubayr (d. 73 A.H.) and 'Aa'ishah (d. 57 A.H.).

The generation that came after the Companions, the Successors, studied eagerly under the wise guardianship of the Companions. These students took over their predecessors' responsibilities, and passed this knowledge faithfully to the next generation. Ibn 'Abbaas' students, Sa'eed ibn Jubayr (d. 95 A.H.), Mujaahid ibn Jabr (d. 100 A.H.), 'Ikrimah al-Barbaree (d. 104 A.H.), Taawoos ibn Kaysaan (d. 106 A.H.), and 'Ataa' ibn Rabaah (d. 114 A.H.), were all famous in Makkah; Ubay ibn Ka'ab's students, Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 63 A.H.), Aboo al-'Aaliyah (d. 90 A.H.) and Muhammad ibn Ka'ab (d. 120 A.H.), were the teachers of Madeenah; and in Iraaq, 'Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood left behind his great legacy to 'Alqamah ibn Qays (d. 60 A.H.), Masrooq ibn al-Ajda' (d. 63 A.H.), al-Hasan al-Basree (d. 110 A.H.), and Qataadah as-Sadoosee (d. 110 A.H.). These three places, Makkah, Madeenah, and Koofah, were the leading centres of all the sciences of Islaam, including *tafseer* and *'uloom al-Qur'aan*.

11 Reported by al-Bukhaaree.

12 Reported by al-Bukhaaree.

13 ar-Roomee, p. 37.

14 A term that means 'The rightly-guided Caliphs', used to denote the first four caliphs, Aboo Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmaan and 'Alee.